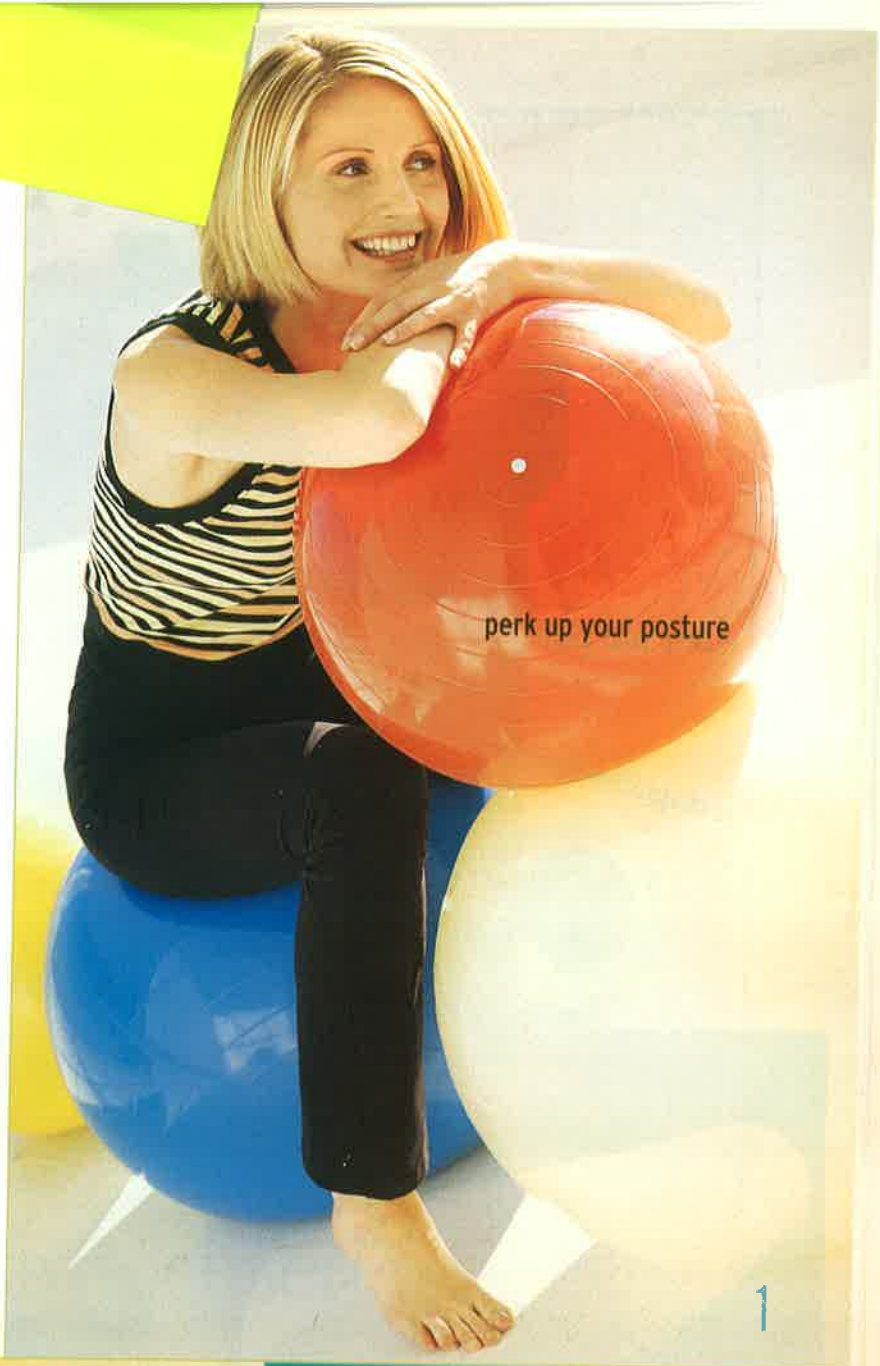
gadgets & gizmos to reduce stress, boost energy, ease aches

By Elizabeth Yow

Strained? Drained? Stiff and sore? On these two pages you'll find affordable and effective health aids that can vanquish pain, promote relaxation and help you stay in shape. All are available through mail order, so you won't waste time tracking down this great gear.



1. GET ON THE BALL Posture Balls, long used in physical therapy centers for support during strengthening and stretching, have a new function: as desk chairs! While perched on a ball, you must make continual minuscule movements that strengthen back, shoulder, and abdominal muscles and keep posture perfect, says Deby Harper, a certified personal trainer and president of the Fitness Company in Scottsdale, Ariz. The balls come in five sizes: two for pre-schoolers ($20 and 25), one for school-age kids ($30, in red, shown right), office-chair size ($35 to $45, in blue and white, shown right), and extra large, for taller people ($45). From the Fitness Company at 602-443-9611. 2. IT HITS THE SPOT Neck and shoulder muscles tighten up easily. To relax them, physical therapists often use devices like the Still Point Inducer, a softly curved plastic neck rest. Just lie down with the back of your neck on the globes; the pressure loosens muscles in minutes. Order it for $22 from the Self Care catalog at 800-345-3371. 3. THE BEST HEADREST According to a study from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, the Mediflow pillow can ease neck pain and alleviate headaches. The secret? The water-filled bag inside insures continuous, comfortable support. Purchase the $44.95 pillow through OPTP at 800-367-7393. 4. FEET FIRST The Footmate foot massager features soft *and* stiff bristles and a suction cup that adheres temporarily to a tub's bottom (so you can scrub feet without bending over). The reward?

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALEX HADEN (BOTTOM, LEFT AND RIGHT); JENNY ACHESON (TOP); HAIR, GEORGE KYRIAKOS FOR SALLY HARLOR; MAKEUP, ALISON RAFFAELE FOR BOBBI BROWN ESSENTIALS; SHIRT, IZOD LACOSTE; BOOT-CUT LEGGINGS, BODY WRAPPERS